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Advancement of women

Improvement of the situation of women in rural areas

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 64/140, reviews the activities undertaken by Member States and United Nations entities to empower rural women and contains recommendations for consideration by the Assembly.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 64/140 on the improvement of the situation of women in rural areas, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report on the implementation of the resolution at its sixty-sixth session. In response to that request, the present report provides an assessment of the situation of rural women, highlighting the efforts of Member States,[1] the United Nations system[2] and other actors to address the obstacles and challenges that impede progress towards the economic empowerment of rural women and to enable them to improve their lives and livelihoods. It contains recommendations for consideration by the Assembly.

2. At the High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals in 2010, Member States highlighted rural women as critical agents for enhancing agricultural and rural development and food security and pledged to ensure equal access for rural women to productive resources, land, financing, technologies, training and markets.[3] In the Istanbul Programme of Action (A/CONF.219/3), Member States reaffirmed those commitments.

3. At its fifty-sixth session in 2012, the Commission on the Status of Women will consider the "Empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges" as its priority theme. In accordance with its methods of work, the Commission is expected to adopt a set of agreed conclusions on the priority theme that identify gaps and challenges in the implementation of previous commitments and make action-oriented recommendations in order to accelerate their implementation by all stakeholders.

II. Background

4. The proportion of people living in extreme poverty — on less than $1.25 a day — in rural areas of developing countries dropped from 48 per cent to 34 per cent over the decade from 2000 to 2010, much of it owing to income gains in East Asia, particularly China. Despite income gains that have lifted more than 350 million rural people out of extreme poverty, poverty remains a massive and predominantly rural phenomenon, with 70 per cent of the 1.4 billion extremely poor in the developing world living in rural areas. Nearly one third of these live in sub-Saharan Africa, while South Asia is now home to about 50 per cent of them.[4]

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[1] Contributions were received from Canada, Denmark, El Salvador, Greece, Italy, Japan, Lebanon, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Togo and the United Arab Emirates.

[2] The following United Nations entities provided inputs: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), International Labour Organization (ILO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), World Health Organization (WHO) and World Bank.

[3] See General Assembly resolution 65/1.

[4] IFAD, *Rural Poverty Report 2011* (Rome, 2011) available from www.ifad.org/rpr2011/report/e/rpr2011.pdf.

5. The persistence of rural poverty has meant that rural areas lag behind urban areas in almost all of the Millennium Development Goals. For example, only one third of rural women receive prenatal care compared to 50 per cent in developing regions as a whole. Child malnutrition in developing regions is twice as common in rural areas as in urban areas, owing to more restricted access to food, water and sanitation and health care, and children under 5 are more at risk of dying in rural than in urban households.[5]

6. Increasingly volatile food prices, the uncertainties and effects of climate change and a range of natural resource constraints further complicate efforts to reduce rural poverty and inequality and to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. At the same time, changes in agricultural markets may give rise to new opportunities that can boost productivity for smallholder farmers in developing countries. Such changes will be necessary to ensure enough food for an increasingly urbanized global population, expected to reach at least 9 billion by 2050,[6] as well as equitable access to food in rural areas.

7. Continuing gender disparities in access to and control over resources, including technology, agricultural extension services and limited rural infrastructure, result in higher labour costs and lower productivity for women than men. When women have access to land, it is often of poorer quality and consists of smaller plots. Gender inequalities impose real costs on the agriculture sector, the broader economy and society, as well as on rural women themselves. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has calculated that if women had the same access to productive resources as men, their increased yields could raise total agricultural output in developing countries by an estimated 2.5 to 4 per cent, which could reduce the total number of hungry people by 12 to 17 per cent and contribute to improving family nutrition and health.[7] With equal access to property rights, technology and services, women could provide the engine of growth to break the poverty cycle.

8. While gross domestic product growth generated by agriculture has been shown to be twice as effective in reducing poverty as growth in other sectors,[8] macroeconomic policies, including market and trade liberalization, impact differently on women and men. Export-oriented agriculture in developing countries has promoted cash crop cultivation, resulting in volatile food prices and increased food insecurity, and poses particular challenges to subsistence farmers, the majority of whom are women.[9] Structural adjustment and budget stabilization policies have

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[5] United Nations, *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2010 and 2011* (New York, 2010 and 2011), available from www.un.org/millenniumgoals/reports.shtml.

[6] This projection assumes that fertility in all countries converges to replacement level. See United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, "World population prospects, the 2010 revision", available from http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/Analytical-Figures/htm/fig_1.htm.

[7] FAO, *The State of Food and Agriculture: Women in Agriculture, Closing the Gender Gap for Development* (Rome, 2010-2011), available from www.fao.org/docrep/013/i2050e/i2050e.pdf.

[8] Speech by the President of IFAD at the second international conference on long-term investments in the age of globalization, Rome, 17 June 2010. See www.ifad.org/events/op/2010/ltic.htm.

[9] *2009 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Women's Control over Economic Resources and Access to Financial Resources, including Microfinance* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.09.IV.7).

focused on promoting privatization, deregulation of domestic markets and liberalization of trade and capital flows. Resulting reductions in government spending, including on essential rural infrastructure and public services, have made these services harder for women and girls to access while increasing the burden of unpaid care work.[10]

9. Currently, few countries systematically consider the differential impact of their agricultural policies and spending priorities by gender,[7] in part due to lack of sex-disaggregated household data level, as well as the failure to apply a gender impact analysis to such policies and priorities.

10. The international community can play an important role in terms of financial support to rural development and the agricultural sector. Statistics provided by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD-DAC) show that of the $7.5 billion in funding allocated to agriculture and rural development in 2008-2009, only 3 per cent of the amount screened for gender focus was allocated to programmes in which gender equality was a principal aim and 32 per cent to those in which gender equality was a secondary aim. The L'Aquila Food Security Initiative adopted at the Group of Eight summit in 2009 has mobilized pledges of over $22 billion to reverse the decline of investment in agriculture and improve food security. It will be critical to ensure that rural women are equal beneficiaries of these funds.[11]

11. To make real progress in rural development and sustainable agriculture, the power and creativity of rural women must be recognized, invested in and used. Improving women's access to resources, assets and decision-making and building individual and collective capacity would create local opportunities and help mitigate the risks they face. Asset accumulation, including land, livestock and other resources, can also build a buffer against shocks, which are expected to increase with climate change.

III. Economic empowerment of women in rural areas

12. Rural women play a vital, yet not fully acknowledged, role in agriculture and rural development. For instance, women comprise 43 per cent of the agricultural labour force in developing countries, ranging from 20 per cent in Latin America to almost 50 per cent in some parts of Africa and Asia. In South and East Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, women's share of agricultural employment within total employment is higher than that of men. In rural areas with high levels of male outmigration, women's roles in agriculture are expanding, leading to dramatic changes in their responsibilities and tasks.[7]

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[10] Unpaid care work includes both personal care (e.g. children, the sick and the elderly) and care-related activities (e.g. fetching water and firewood, cooking, cleaning and washing). See also UNDP policy brief, "Unpaid care work", Gender Equality and Poverty Reduction series No. 1, October 2009, available from http://content.undp.org/go/cms-service/stream/asset/?asset_id=3231016.

[11] *Muskoka Accountability Report: Assessing Action and Results Against Development-Related Commitments* (Muskoka, 2010), available from http://www.donorplatform.org/activities/food-security/news/198-g-20-renews-commitment-to-agricultural-development.html.

13. Rural women are crucial in the translation of agricultural production into food and nutritional security, since they are often responsible for cultivating food crops, managing small animals, growing vegetables in home gardens for food or income and food preparation. They have developed solutions to many challenges in sustainable land and water management, climate change mitigation and adaptation and preservation of indigenous and local knowledge.

14. In sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, in addition to being the main producers of household food, women contribute substantially to non-agricultural production in rural areas, especially in the informal sector and in small and medium-size enterprises.

15. Despite the contribution of rural women to rural development in both developing and developed countries, their rights and priorities remain insufficiently addressed in legal frameworks, national and local development policies and investment strategies at all levels. They continue to face serious challenges in carrying out their multiple productive and reproductive roles within their families and communities, in part due to lack of rural infrastructure and essential goods and services.

16. It would, however, be a mistake to portray rural women as weak and vulnerable. Rather, they should be regarded as active economic agents with untapped potential to make a significant contribution to mitigating the effects of climate change, food insecurity and rural poverty, as well as to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

17. The following sections examine the situation of women in rural areas and illustrate some of the initiatives implemented since December 2009 to enhance their economic empowerment, specifically highlighting effective institutions and local service delivery; employment and decent work; unpaid care work; land ownership; local and indigenous knowledge; contributions to climate change adaptation; and productive technology.

A. Effective institutions for policy and planning and local service delivery

18. The empowerment of women in rural areas requires gender-responsive national and local development strategies and sector-specific plans, programmes and budgets to address the specific obstacles they face in accessing employment and decent work, education and training opportunities, health care and transportation, as well as constraints due to their disproportionate family responsibilities. Gender-sensitive governance in the institutions responsible for rural development, agricultural and other related sectors (such as water and energy management) can enable rural women to hold public officials accountable in areas such as public service delivery. To enhance a systemic approach to rural development, the national strategic plan for Italy includes a mechanism to enable women farm managers to engage in the agricultural value chain from production to processing and marketing. FAO has recently partnered with Governments, such as that in Ghana, to integrate gender equality into national policies on food and agriculture.

19. Gender-responsive national and local budget initiatives are powerful tools for ensuring that national rural development planning and resource allocation target

rural women. An analysis of the allocation of budgetary resources to agricultural activities in Morocco showed that only 9 per cent of the beneficiaries were women, even though women represented 39 per cent of those engaged in rural activity. Responding to these findings, Morocco increased its budget support for programmes benefiting rural women by over 50 per cent in 2007 compared to 2005.[12]

20. The limited basic infrastructure and insufficient local service provision in rural areas restrict the full participation of women in the labour market and in community activities. They also exacerbate their already unequal share of unpaid care work, since they are obliged to spend long hours fetching water and fuel and, without access to technology, spend hours in food-processing and preparation. Public investment in sustainable infrastructure (e.g. public transportation, sanitation and renewable energy) and fuel-efficient and labour-saving technologies (e.g. clean and fuel-efficient cooking stoves, efficient pumping and purification of drinking water) can substantially reduce the time women and girls spend on these time-consuming chores and enhance their options for gainful work and mobility. Such investments can also contribute to reduced greenhouse gas emissions and create employment opportunities in rural areas (see sections C on unpaid care work and E on productive technologies below).

21. Provision of a social protection floor to provide employment guarantees, income support benefits, basic income security guarantees for the elderly and persons with disabilities and child care and benefits can help combat rising inequality and persistent poverty in rural areas. Italy's national strategic plan and regional rural development programmes include strengthened childcare and preschool services in rural areas. Such measures can help overcome insecurity and vulnerability in the lives of rural women and enable them to participate more fully in economic life, as workers, employers, consumers and citizens. They can also help address the multiple inequalities faced by indigenous women or women from ethnic minorities living in rural areas. Efforts are also needed to increase access to health facilities, education, training and other support services (such as shelters for survivors of violence and abuse) for rural women.

22. Integrated services enable rural women to save time and transport costs when they need assistance. In the Republic of Moldova, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) supports "one-stop shops" (joint information and services bureaux) that provide information on employment, social protection, business development, land tenure and finance. The Swedish-funded programme provided almost 500 consultations to rural people in the first half of 2011, of whom 70 per cent were women. The programme is facilitating women's access to e-transformation services, through assisting district service providers to provide mobile phone services to remote villages.

23. Expanding access to financial services for rural women is crucial to their economic empowerment. Kenya initiated the Women Enterprise Fund to provide subsidized credit, as well as training and marketing services, for businesses run by women. Togo trained women in resource management to ensure better credit repayment and established compulsory savings schemes. Mexico, through its rural supply programme, supplies subsidized basic consumer products to community

[12] United Nations Development Fund for Women, *Progress of the World's Women 2008/2009: Who Answers to Women? Gender and Accountability* (New York, 2009).

shops in rural locations to offer savings to rural consumers and improve food and nutrition levels for the rural population. In Uzbekistan, UN-Women supports the Women's Committee and the centres for social and legal support, to help rural women access economic and financial resources, including microcredit.

24. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Health Organization (WHO) have promoted enhanced access to maternal and reproductive health services for rural women. With the world's highest burden of disease, Africa has only 6 per cent of the world's maternal health professionals, with an extremely low number of health professionals in rural areas.[13] To address these challenges, UNFPA works with the International Confederation of Midwives and the ministers of health and education in 15 countries in Africa, the Arab States and Latin America to increase the capacity and the number of midwives; supports midwifery education programmes in Sierra Leone and South Sudan; supports access to reproductive health services in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkmenistan; and uses mobile health units to reach women living in remote areas of Afghanistan, Bolivia (the Plurinational State of), Haiti, Nepal, Pakistan, Swaziland, Turkey and Yemen. In the Niger, solar radios and story kits have been used to improve access for rural women and girls to information on maternal health, schooling for girls, prevention of HIV/AIDS and unwanted pregnancies.

25. To address the challenges of nutritional deficiencies in poor rural areas, FAO and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) have supported local projects in numerous countries to establish and maintain home gardens producing species such as quinoa, millet, amaranth, leafy vegetables and some groundnuts, which have also resulted in income-generating activities for women.

26. Rural women also require knowledge and support to gain access to their rights. Governments and the United Nations system have made efforts to improve local services for women in rural areas. For example, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has helped establish eight legal help centres in Afghanistan to provide legal protection and support to victims of domestic violence and has assisted Lebanon in providing more equitable social services. The General Women's Union of the United Arab Emirates has organized workshops to increase rural women's awareness of their labour rights, as well as rights to pension and divorce.

27. Efforts have been made to strengthen women's participation and leadership in rural institutions, such as agricultural producer and rural worker associations, cooperatives, rural credit unions, water users' groups and self-help groups. For example, in its work with rural producer organizations, FAO emphasizes gender-responsive and participatory approaches to promote the enhanced efficiency of such organizations in servicing the needs of all female and male farmers and communities. Producer organizations offer members a range of services and thus provide rural women with a collective way to access productive resources, information and markets.

28. The participation of rural women in self-help groups can contribute to their enhanced access to productive inputs and support services, such as land, extension services, fertilizers and seeds, and strengthen their capacity to manage land and

[13] UNFPA and other agencies, *The State of the World's Midwifery Report 2011: Delivering Health, Saving Lives* (Geneva, 2011), available from www.who.int/pmnch/media/membernews/2011/20110620sowmr/en/index.html.

other resources. UN-Women has helped to build a partnership between women's self-help groups and the Ministry of Agriculture in Kyrgyzstan. This project provided rural women with vegetable seeds under a World Bank food security project and led to the formation of 51 rural women's groups in 17 villages. Over 22,000 people (half of them women) have benefited from grants from UN-Women, with matching contributions from the community and local government. The projects resulted in expansion in small-scale irrigation and infrastructure projects; job creation; improved vegetable production; and better school conditions. The self-help groups established community development funds to be used to purchase inputs for the following years.

29. Farmers' groups can be an effective way of disseminating technologies and enabling cooperative action. IFAD, in collaboration with the International Centre for Research in Agroforestry, worked with farmers' groups in Cameroon, Gabon, Guinea and Nigeria to increase incomes from the use of new techniques for indigenous tree cultivation. Through their participation in such groups, women farmers benefited from the new technologies and gained confidence and self-esteem.

B. Employment and decent work

30. Paid employment is a primary force for reducing poverty and food insecurity and for empowering rural women economically. However, decent and productive employment in rural areas remains a great challenge. Decent work deficits faced by rural workers, in particular women and youth, include low pay, poor quality jobs, widespread underemployment, absence of labour rights, inadequate social protection and the lack of a representative voice. The implementation of labour laws, regulations and policies is usually limited in rural areas.[14] Rural women tend to be employed in the more precarious forms of informal employment, as unpaid family workers on family farms or as casual day labourers on farms owned by others.[15]

31. Realizing the potential of rural women requires tackling all of the decent work deficits mentioned above. Initiatives to enhance rural women's employment opportunities in the agricultural sector are being carried out by Member States and United Nations partner agencies in many countries. In Norway, for example, the Government has created new jobs for women in new agricultural industries, particularly those that provide food and services to the health, education and social care sectors. The Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies of Italy, in paying greater attention to women in agriculture, promotes the concept of multifunctional agriculture through the creation and promotion of new professional profiles and employment opportunities in rural areas. FAO has provided women with skills training in agricultural extension work in Mozambique, Swaziland, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia; Canada has supported skills training for women as animal health extension workers in China, post-harvest

[14] ILO, *Promotion of Rural Employment for Poverty Reduction*, report IV for the 97th session of the International Labour Conference. Available from www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_091721.pdf. See also http://www.fao-ilo.org/fao-ilo-gender/en/ for more information on gender-equitable rural employment.

[15] See IFAD "Gender-equitable rural work to reduce poverty and boost economic growth", Gender and Rural Employment Policy Brief No. 1 (Rome, 2010); and ILO, *Promotion of Rural Employment for Poverty Reduction* (Geneva, 2008).

processing in Ghana and vegetable production for returning women refugees in the Sudan. In Togo, multifunctional platforms are being installed to create employment and income-generating opportunities for women and help move their agricultural products up the value chain by increasing their market value.

32. In building Malian women's capacity to produce shea butter, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), with support from the Canadian International Development Agency and the National Karité Programme, helped transfer processing equipment to women's groups in three centres, enabling them to meet international standards. As a result, a joint venture company has been set up between the women's groups and a French cosmetics company for the supply of 40 tons of shea-based soap bars in 2011. Similarly, FAO provided women producers with information on shea processing and product certification techniques in Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Senegal. Japan provides rural women entrepreneurs engaged in local food-processing with training to develop new products and improve the management of farmers' markets.

33. While providing a livelihood for some 86 per cent of rural women and men and generating jobs for some 1.3 billion smallholder farmers and landless workers,[16] agriculture alone cannot reduce rural poverty. Rural off-farm employment opportunities are critical for rural development, growth and poverty reduction. It allows households to diversify their income sources and insure themselves against economic and environmental shocks affecting agriculture. Women can play an important role in the wholesale and retail trade, rural industry, agribusiness, trading enterprises, transport, storage and infrastructure development, as well as in the local service sector (e.g. education, health, finance and insurance, tourism and local shops and restaurants).

34. Public works programmes in some countries have provided models of decent working conditions by offering a fixed work schedule, decent wages, childcare and social protection. For example, India has implemented the National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme since 2006, guaranteeing 100 days of work to rural households for unskilled manual workers. The 33 per cent reservation for women workers and the provision of childcare at the sites has contributed greatly to the high level of participation of women. During 2010 and 2011, almost 50 million households were employed under this programme and the share of women averaged 47 per cent.[17]

35. Many initiatives by Governments and the United Nations system focus on improving the productive capacity of rural women and on diversifying their sources of income in the non-agricultural sector by providing business training and skills in enterprise development. For example, Mozambique, supported by UNIDO and the Government of Norway, has introduced an entrepreneurship programme into the curriculum of its formal secondary and tertiary education system, encouraging girls

[16] World Bank, *World Development Report 2008: Agriculture for Development* (Washington, D.C., 2007), overview.

[17] UNDP policy brief, "Employment guarantee policies", Gender Equality and Poverty Reduction series, No. 2, April 2010, available from http://www.beta.undp.org/content/dam/aplaws/publication/en/publications/womens-empowerment/policy-brief-gender-equality-and-employment-guarantee-policies-/Policy%20Brief%20Employment%20FINAL.pdf. See also the Ministry of Rural Development, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 website, http://nrega.nic.in/.

to work in non-traditional enterprises that challenge gender stereotypes and sensitizing their families to the benefits of girls starting small businesses. The programme is now being replicated and scaled up in Angola, Cameroon, Cape Verde and Namibia.

36. A programme implemented by UNDP in Turkmenistan has provided training in business development and operation (e.g. finance, marketing and sales) to more than 60 rural women, who in turn have trained other women in these skills. Tracking the impact of business training on 50 out of 250 businesswomen in Kenya, under the Empretec programme,[18] UNDP found that 30 per cent of the women had recorded an expansion in their enterprises through diversification and adding value. UNIDO has developed a rural and women entrepreneurship development service that encourages collective self-help efforts, access to information and communication technologies and renewable energy solutions. Status of Women Canada supports women's financial literacy and employability skills training. Canada's Rural Partnership Community Development Program supports knowledge-building among young rural women, women's leadership initiatives, and youth entrepreneurship activities for female entrepreneurs, using the collective capacity of rural communities in developing skills and identifying opportunities. Greece encourages rural women's entrepreneurship by supporting the modernization of smallholdings in rural areas and developing small enterprises and tourist opportunities. A regional project in Denmark focuses on strengthening the managerial and business competencies of businesses owned by women.

C. Unpaid care work

37. Rural women invest considerable amounts of time in unpaid work related to child and elder care, food production and food-processing, water and energy collection and other household chores. In so doing they support the private commodity and public service economies by supplying productive human capital as well as social capital. At the same time, the heavy burden this puts on women diverts their time away from farming tasks and non-farm enterprise activities, impacting their productivity and incomes, which in turn affects rural consumption, investment and savings. Importantly, if women's unpaid household and care work ceased, the private commodity and public service economies would be seriously disrupted.[19]

38. Since time poverty, resulting from unpaid household and care work, is one of the most critical factors hindering women's access to paid work in rural areas,[20] investment in time- and labour-saving technologies and the expansion of access to key infrastructure (e.g. rural water and irrigation systems, domestic energy and rural transportation) is critical to women's economic empowerment and could have substantial multiplier effects on poverty reduction and economic growth. Providing income and caregiving support to rural households also reduces the strain of rural-urban migration in many countries.

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[18] Empretec is an integrated capacity-building programme of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. See http://www.unctadxi.org/templates/Page____7362.aspx.

[19] See UNDP policy brief, "Unpaid care work" (see ch. II, footnote 10).

[20] FAO, IFAD, ILO, *Gender Dimensions of Agricultural and Rural Employment: Differentiated Pathways Out of Poverty* (Rome, 2010), available from www.fao.org/docrep/013/i1638e/i1638e.pdf.

39. A wide range of innovative technologies and techniques, including improved cooking stoves, rainwater harvesting schemes and intermediate transport devices, grinding mills and other food-processing equipment, have proven to help reduce women's time poverty.[21] The introduction of the first multifunctional platform in Burkina Faso in 2002 represented a giant step towards breaking the vicious cycle of women's time and energy poverty. A 2009 report highlights the time saving of three hours for grinding millet and similar savings for fetching water with the introduction of these platforms.[22]

40. In order to reduce women's unpaid care responsibilities, Italy has prioritized the provision of family care services in all rural development policies, particularly in rural areas in the south, which have high unemployment rates and infrastructure deficits. In addressing a better balance in childcare responsibilities, Norway promotes equal parenthood and has introduced measures to strengthen the role of all fathers in childcare, including in rural areas. Similarly, the family code of El Salvador has made work in the home and the care of children a joint responsibility of both partners.

41. Time-use studies provide a rich source of data on the differentiated roles of rural women and men and provide practical guidance for policymakers and practitioners involved in technology investment, extension services, post-harvest activities and marketing interventions. FAO has created a range of gender analysis tools that assist in generating data and knowledge on the roles and unpaid work contributions of rural women, such as the Agri-Gender Statistics Toolkit,[23] which provides a compilation of gender-sensitive indicators and questionnaire components on the responsibilities of women and men farmers. In its "family management agreement", Japan calls upon each family to stipulate details on decision-making in agricultural management, work hours and wages.

D. Land ownership and inheritance

42. While it is difficult to determine women's average share of agricultural land ownership in developing countries, owing to the lack of data in many countries, it falls far short of their participation in the agricultural labour force in developing countries, which is 43 per cent. Stark gender disparities in land holdings are apparent in all regions. Based on various data sources, including household surveys and agricultural censuses, FAO has estimated that in countries with available data, women represent fewer than 5 per cent of all agricultural landholders in North Africa and West Asia, and on average 15 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa. This disparity has resulted not only in lower agricultural productivity of women compared to men, but also in greater poverty of female-headed households.[7]

43. Farmers almost everywhere depend on land ownership for accessing irrigation, extension services, credit, subsidies and decision-making power. The fact that rural

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[21] Marilyn Carr with Maria Hartl, *Lightening the Load: Labour-saving Technologies and Practices for Rural Women*, IFAD and Practical Action Publishing (Rugby, United Kingdom, 2010), available from www.ifad.org/gender/pub/load.pdf.

[22] UNDP, "The multi-functional platform: bringing energy, ushering in change for the better to Burkina Faso's rural communities", January 2009, available from www.pnud.bf/DOCS/Platform-ENG.pdf.

[23] See www.fao.org/gender/agrigender/en/.

women are less likely than men to own land not only makes their farm work less productive but also frequently excludes them from farmers' organizations, workers' unions and community networks and forums that promote enhanced productivity and growth.

44. Countries in all regions have instituted land reform policies designed to break up large holdings and grant individual or joint land titles. In both formal and customary property regimes, men are generally the main beneficiaries of land titles (both in terms of quantity and quality of land). Opposition from land reform authorities, village authorities and male relatives can frustrate efforts to extend legal land rights to both single and married women.

45. In countries where both women and men have formal legal rights to land and property, limited implementation of such laws or customary practice may prevent women from realizing these rights. This was, for example, the case in a number of land titling programmes in Latin America in the 1990s, despite statutory gender equality. In cases where women have enjoyed customary, communal or collective land rights, land reforms have often eroded women's rights as titles have generally been given to male heads of household. This was the case in Central Asia during the post-Soviet reforms.[24] It is therefore essential to ensure women's equal rights in all laws related to land and property, including family and inheritance laws, and to monitor their effective implementation.

46. Some Member States have enacted legislation and implemented initiatives to provide women with equitable access to land and other property. Women have equal rights to own property in 115 countries and have equal inheritance rights in 93 countries.[25] In El Salvador, for example, women are guaranteed equal access to joint title deeds for agricultural and fishery production units. Some laws go beyond this: a 2009 royal decree in Spain encourages shared ownership of agrarian holdings and extends social security benefits to women co-owners.

47. Since indigenous women have particular constraints in accessing land, due to lack of citizenship rights in many countries, specific efforts are required to secure their rights. For example, the World Bank has promoted the participation of indigenous women in communal land management organizations in Guatemala and in capacity-building workshops on land administration and property rights in Honduras. In Mexico, rural and indigenous women leaders were brought together in an "encounter" to discuss their concerns related to land tenure and ownership and access to institutions. In New Zealand, rural and indigenous (Maori) women were granted full and equal rights to own and lease land and other property, including through the right to inheritance.

48. Married women often lack awareness of their land entitlements and may not realize that they do not have rights over the family land until the marriage is dissolved or the husband dies. This is often the situation in countries hard hit by HIV/AIDS. Awareness-raising and capacity-building of rural women to learn about and claim their rights over land and other property is a critical step towards ensuring women's rights. UN-Women, with the help of local land specialists, local authorities

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[24] United Nations Research Institute for Social Development "Land tenure reform and gender equality", Research and Policy Brief No. 4 (Geneva, 2006) available from http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Digital-Library/Policy-Briefs/Detail/?lng=en&id=28606.

[25] UN-Women, *Progress of the World's Women 2011-2012: In Pursuit of Justice* (New York, 2011).

and representatives of local justice systems, has assisted more than 1,800 rural women and their families in Kyrgyzstan in better understanding the land registration process, providing titles and certifying land share documents. In Tajikistan, UN-Women partnered with FAO in supporting 16 legal assistance centres to monitor the distribution of agricultural land to secure land tenure for rural women. El Salvador has set up consultative councils and social oversight bodies to support women's claims to land rights and demand for government accountability.

49. It is equally important to build the capacity of the legal system to uphold women's right to own land and other property. To this end, in Mozambique FAO trained over 90 women and men as paralegals on land law and women's access to land. A majority of the trainees, a quarter of whom were women, represented non-governmental organizations. An evaluation found that the paralegals were able to successfully support communities in a number of conflicts.

50. To enable people to use dialogue and negotiation to reach consensus on controversial issues, FAO developed preliminary guidelines for improving gender equality in territorial issues and undertook extensive consultations in 2009 and 2010 with the United Nations system, Governments, civil society and the private sector. The draft voluntary guidelines on responsible governance of tenure of land and other natural resources, which FAO prepared as a result of this process, have been widely circulated since early 2011. Implementation of the guidelines is planned for 2012 and beyond.

51. Intra-household data and information disaggregated by sex is critical for promoting a better and full understanding of women's rights to land and other property, informed policy-making and land reforms and divorce and inheritance laws.[26] FAO has developed the Gender and Land Rights Database[27] to make available information on national legal frameworks, policies enforcing or preventing women's land rights, international treaties and conventions, customary laws and other relevant subjects for 78 countries.

E. Productive technologies

52. Science, technology and innovation offer solutions to many of the challenges faced by rural women: they can contribute to food security by boosting crop yields; reduce women's unpaid care work by introducing labour-saving technologies (see section C above); and increase participation of women in the rural labour market through better communications.

53. However, mechanization and advanced technologies can sometimes have an adverse impact on women's employment opportunities. For example, FAO and IFAD, reviewing programme interventions from 2000 to 2010, noted that the adoption of high-yielding varieties of rice and wheat after the Green Revolution in India and of drum seeders in rice cultivation in South and South-East Asia saved

[26] Cheryl Doss, Caren Grown and Carmen Diana Deere, "Collecting individual level asset data for gender analysis of poverty and rural employment", paper presented at the FAO-IFAD-ILO workshop on gaps, trends and current research in gender dimensions of agricultural and rural employment, Rome, April 2009.

[27] Available from www.fao.org/gender/landrights.

time and labour for wealthier farmers, but meant that the poorest and landless women agricultural labourers no longer had access to traditional jobs.

54. Numerous initiatives have been carried out to promote women's access to agriculture and food-processing technologies with a view to enhancing the empowerment, productivity and integration into the global value chain of women farmers. For example, improved technology and production methods provided to women entrepreneurs in Morocco helped boost their production of olive oil. This initiative of UNIDO and the Spanish Cooperation Agency also enabled women producers to control the quality and level of acidity, produce safe and good-quality oil, improve their marketing, packaging design and registration of trademarks, diversify into higher value-added products and obtain organic certification. As a result, women's overall earnings have more than doubled. In Afghanistan and Pakistan, IFAD, in collaboration with the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas, provided women with basic low-cost technologies and training to improve their production of milk products from goats.

55. To support small producers with improved access to applied technologies and practices on a variety of rural activities, FAO has developed an interactive platform: "Technologies and practices for small agricultural producers",[28] which includes a database and online forums. The platform goes beyond standardized descriptions of proven technologies and has evolved into a tool to strengthen institutions in sharing and testing technologies for small-scale farmers.

56. Water technologies provide an important means for improving the situation of rural women and for reducing poverty. The multiple-use water system approach is promising, as it addresses broad water needs better than sectoral water development programmes and ensures that all users have fair access to local water resources. Communities participate in planning and selecting technologies that meet their needs, in consultation with local authorities. IFAD has worked to ensure that women are members of local water committees, so that their water needs for domestic and farming purposes are given equal importance. In Nepal, 82 systems have been established, benefiting about 12,000 small farmers. Women have gained from reduced time spent gathering water; girls have been enrolled in school; women's incomes have increased from water fees and high-value crops; and women's role in decision-making within the household has also increased. As part of its water and sanitation joint programme in Mexico, UNDP is supporting the Government in involving women in local water management committees and in using disinfection technologies that improve drinking water quality. The World Bank has promoted women's participation in water management in the Dominican Republic and in Peru. The Bank funded capacity-building for women in financial, technical and management areas, with a view to improving their contributions to water user organizations and management of irrigation systems.

57. Rural women's access to energy technologies for productive use is critical for their economic empowerment. It reduces the time women spend on manual work and allows them to move up the value chain, particularly if there is a steady supply of affordable energy, required for knitting, brewing, food-processing, spinning and textile production. UNIDO supports energy provision for the development of rural enterprises and cottage industries that provide an important source of income for

[28] See http://teca.fao.org/home.

rural women. In Kenya, for example, UNIDO developed a zero-emission renewable energy community power centre, using microhydropower to generate electricity to replace the use of kerosene lamps. It provides energy to small-scale women entrepreneurs engaged in micro-industries such as soap processing and fruit juice production. It is estimated that 10 such centres would offset approximately 5,000 tons of greenhouse gas emissions per year. In Cameroon, UNDP introduced fuel-efficient cooking techniques to indigenous women in the drought-ridden far north. In India, women were trained in solar engineering and have in turn trained other women in the maintenance of solar panels. In 2008, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, in collaboration with the International Network on Gender and Sustainable Energy, organized a regional policy meeting on networking for gender and poverty-sensitive energy policies, which led to a policy innovation forum that focuses on energy innovations for women in poor rural households.

58. Information and communications technology, particularly mobile telephony, offers opportunities for women to monitor market prices for agricultural products, obtain better revenue and eliminate intermediaries. FAO has a number of projects aimed at facilitating women's access to technology, such as in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Niger, where solar energy mobile phones and wind-up radios are used as key media for "listeners clubs" to increase knowledge-sharing, improve flows of information and empower rural populations, particularly women. In India and Pakistan, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in collaboration with private sector providers, has improved the literacy of 1,500 rural women by using mobile phones and text messaging.

F. Protecting knowledge, innovations and practices in indigenous and local communities

59. Indigenous and local communities are the custodians of many different skills, practices and knowledge systems, which have enabled them to adapt to difficult conditions. Recently, however, indigenous livelihoods have deteriorated as the scale and intensity of environmental and cultural loss has increased, upsetting the harmony between indigenous peoples and their surrounding environment.

60. There are an increasing number of initiatives undertaken by Governments and the United Nations system to harness the potential of indigenous knowledge among local people. For example, UNESCO has paid particular attention to the key role of women as holders of local and indigenous knowledge in traditional medicine,[29] and as agents of change on three Indian Ocean islands, involving different traditions from Africa, Asia and Europe. Similarly, the Maori health strategy of New Zealand acknowledges that Maori women community health and voluntary workers and their indigenous and traditional healing models have a pivotal role in improving the health of Maori families.

61. UN-Women has worked alongside indigenous women's groups — members of Waorani and Quechua communities — to ensure their involvement in the sustainable

[29] Laurence Pourchez, *Women's Knowledge: Traditional Medicine and Nature — the Islands of Reunion, Mauritius and Rodrigues* (UNESCO, Paris, 2011, in French only).

conservation and management of the natural and cultural heritage of the Yasuní Biosphere Reserve in Ecuador, and provided training to ensure that gender perspectives are integrated into related policies and programmes.

62. In an effort to foster security of livelihoods of indigenous peoples in the Altiplano (Plurinational State of Bolivia), six United Nations agencies (FAO, ILO, UNDP, UNICEF, UNIDO and the World Food Programme), through a joint Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund programme, support indigenous women producers by linking their agricultural products to different markets and value chains. Also through the Fund, FAO, UNDP and UNIDO are implementing a joint programme to promote asset-building, productivity, income and citizenship for indigenous women in extreme poverty in the Plurinational State of Bolivia. Women entrepreneurs are provided with financial and business development services, as well as civil and political rights training.

63. UNFPA collaborates with indigenous organizations in the Plurinational State of Bolivia for the inclusion of ethnic definition data (self-identification) and gender issues in the 2011 census as a way to incorporate the intercultural perspective. In Belize, UNFPA has strengthened the capacity of providers of health services in indigenous communities regarding contraceptive technology.

G. The contribution of rural women to climate change adaptation and mitigation

64. Women make up a large number of the poor in communities that are highly dependent on local natural resources for their livelihood and are disproportionately vulnerable to and affected by climate change, exacerbated by their limited access to resources and decision-making processes. Women in rural areas have the major responsibility for household water supply and energy for cooking and heating, as well as for food security, and are negatively affected by drought, uncertain rainfall and deforestation.[30] Because of their unequal access to resources and limited mobility, women in many contexts are disproportionately affected by natural disasters, such as floods, fires and mudslides. FAO is currently undertaking research to better understand the gender-differentiated impact of climate change and the different coping strategies adopted by women and men, with a view to informing climate change policy, adaptation practices and more sustainable livelihood coping strategies.

65. However, women are not only victims of climate change. They also have a strong body of knowledge and expertise that can be used in climate change mitigation, disaster reduction and adaptation strategies. Women's responsibilities in households and communities as stewards of natural resources have positioned them well for livelihood strategies adapted to changing environmental realities. For example, in Senegal, women's organizations helped control soil erosion by building crescent-shaped canals to retain water, recover croplands and improve agricultural output. Women in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua planted

[30] See Women's Environment and Development Organization, "Changing the climate: why women's perspectives matter", information sheet, 2007, available from http://www.undp.org.cu/crmi/docs/wedo-ccwomen-in-2007-en.pdf.

400,000 Maya nut trees to increase food sources while preserving and increasing carbon sinks.[31]

66. Women tend to be underrepresented in national- and local-level decision-making on sustainable development, including on climate change, which impedes their ability to contribute their unique and valuable perspectives and expertise on climate change. To strengthen women's economic decision-making in households affected by illicit drug cultivation, the Forest Warden Families Programme in Colombia, supported by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, provides 71 per cent of economic incentives directly to women. In supporting conservation agriculture in Zambia, Norway has increased the number of female farmers who are trained, thereby supporting them to take decisions on adapting to climate change to improve crop yields and reduce their workload.

67. Financing mechanisms must be flexible enough to reflect women's priorities and needs. The active participation of women in the development of funding criteria and allocation of resources for climate change initiatives is critical, particularly at the local level. Gender analysis of all budget lines and financial instruments for climate change is needed to ensure gender-sensitive investments in programmes for adaptation, mitigation, technology transfer and capacity-building.

68. Technological developments related to climate change should take into account women's specific priorities and needs and make full use of their knowledge and expertise, including traditional practices. Women's involvement in the development of new technologies can ensure that they are user-friendly, effective and sustainable. For example, UNDP implemented an energy access programme in nine regions of Burkina Faso, benefiting more than 27,000 women with improved energy technology, business and incomes. In eight communities in Senegal, UNDP, in collaboration with the Ndiop Women's Association, rolled out a solar cooker, produced with locally available materials, that has reduced the time women spend gathering firewood and also the health risks from smoke exposure. Similar initiatives were carried out in Nepal, where microhydropower, biogas and improved cooking stoves have contributed to women's empowerment.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

69. Rural women continue to be economically and socially disadvantaged because of their limited access to economic resources and opportunities, their exclusion from planning and decision-making and their disproportionate burden of unpaid care work. While there is growing recognition that rural women, including indigenous women, are critical agents in poverty reduction, food security, environmental sustainability and other aspects relating to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, insufficient attention has been paid to the factors that deepen inequalities between rural women and men, and inadequate action has been taken to eliminate discrimination and overcome the structural disadvantages faced by women.

70. Member States and United Nations entities have taken measures to improve the situation of rural women and girls in relation to expanding their access to local services, employment and entrepreneurship, land rights and

[31] UNDP, *Resource Guide on Gender and Climate Change* (New York, 2009).

technologies. They have also taken steps to recognize, reduce and redistribute women's burden of unpaid care work, protect indigenous and local knowledge and promote women's contribution to climate change adaptation and mitigation. These initiatives currently benefit only a small number of communities, however, and there is a lack of evidence about the impact of those efforts and the results achieved in regard to the empowerment of, and poverty reduction among, rural women.

71. **The achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in rural areas would require a more coherent, systematic and strategic integration of the economic empowerment of women and girls in rural areas into national development strategies and plans, including in the areas of rural development, infrastructure and local governance.**

72. **The Commission on the Status of Women will consider the empowerment of rural women as its priority theme in 2012. This provides an opportunity for the Commission to monitor, review and appraise progress achieved and problems encountered in the implementation of previous commitments and to make action-oriented recommendations to accelerate their implementation. The General Assembly may wish to invite all stakeholders to undertake preparations for the session, including through consultations with civil society, and encourage participation at the session from all relevant sectoral ministries and government agencies to facilitate action-oriented discussions and outcomes.**

73. **The General Assembly may wish to call on Governments, United Nations entities and all other relevant stakeholders:**

(a) **To strengthen the implementation of all existing commitments on rural development and rural women's empowerment and rights, in particular the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and their application to women in rural areas;**

(b) **To undertake participatory needs and impact assessments for the economic empowerment of rural women and, based on such assessments, adopt gender-responsive rural development strategies and budget frameworks and ensure that the needs and priorities of rural women and girls are systematically addressed, that they can effectively contribute to poverty and hunger eradication and that appropriate budgets are allocated in the implementation of such strategies and in the delivery of local services;**

(c) **To put in place temporary special measures to realize the full and equal participation in decision-making bodies at the national and local levels of rural and indigenous women, including on agricultural policy boards and rural development commissions, water and land committees and associations of employers, farmers, producers and small businesses;**

(d) **To target rural women in national and local employment creation initiatives and build their productive capacity to enable them to participate in the global value chain and strengthen their contribution to national and local development;**

(e) **To develop monitoring and evaluation strategies and frameworks on gender equality and women's empowerment in rural areas to ensure tracking of progress, impact and result of actions taken;**

(f) To strengthen the capacity of national statistical offices to collect, analyse and disseminate comparable sex-disaggregated data, including on time use, and gender statistics in rural areas to serve as a basis for gender-responsive policy design and strategy development in rural areas;

(g) To compile and share examples of good practices and lessons learned in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in rural areas, with a view to replicating and scaling up successes;

(h) To integrate the perspectives of rural and indigenous women into the preparations for and outcome of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, to be held in Brazil in 2012, with a view to accelerating progress on gender equality and women's empowerment in rural areas.